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## "The Fight for Israel's History"

by Kenneth W. Stein

Among the differences between the annual meetings last month of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and the Association for Israel Studies (AIS), perhaps nothing stood out so profoundly as their respective views of Zionist and Israeli history.

For example, the AIPAC audience saw stirring video reminders of the liberation of the Nazi death camps 60 years ago. AIPAC Executive Director Howard Kohr introduced a World War II veteran who liberated the camp where his relatives were. By contrast, the AIS meeting offered more than 100 academic presentations, but only one paper had the word "Zionist" in its title.

AIPAC's conference drew more than 5,000 people to Washington and was as meticulously choreographed as a national political convention. The AIS meeting drew about 125 academics to a hotel in Tucson.

By the time the AIPAC delegates left Washington, they had button-holed their congressional representatives with broad appeals for support for Israel and made sure the lawmakers knew they would be raising money for future campaigns.

On the other side of the continent, you could sense that many at the AIS meeting would have gladly opposed sending another American foreign aid dollar to the Jewish state unless Israel with draws fully from the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem. To be fair, some of the AIS conferees are staunch defenders of Israel, although they are perfectly capable of constructive criticism without moving to deconstruct the Jewish state.

Still, of the many papers presented at the AIS meeting, one in particular set off alarm bells: It suggested that the most popular texts students read in college courses about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have been written by Edward Said, Benny Morris and Avi Shlaim, all of whom have been relentlessly critical of Israel's recent history.

It wasn't a scientific survey, but it deserves notice because of the questions it raised. For example:

- What happened to the part of Zionist and Israeli history that recalls dedication and sacrifice?

- What happened to teaching about Israel as part of Jewish history and how it helped powerless Jews gain power?

- What happened to learning about the struggle to get Jews to Israel and the creation of the Middle East's only democracy?

AIPAC's audience sees Israel in a constant struggle against evil, while the survey suggests that Israel is pictured in many college courses as having engaged in evil- or even as the cause.

Meanwhile, a battle is raging on U.S. campuses about how Zionist and Israeli history is taught as issues like academic freedom are being weighed against the right of teachers to present their point of view. This is a gray area- preachers or teachers? Teach students how to think or what to think?

Still whether enough Israeli history is taught, where, how and in what frequency in a student's development must be a matter of deep concern to every Jew. If you haven't joined this fray, you must-- that means every alumnus and every parent of every student in every college. Other wise, our children and their children will have no historical context in which to judge their identity

or their varied and often contentious Jewish roots.

Teaching our history diligently unto our children is an obligation that cannot be shirked. It must be retold and reinterpreted, but we must not allow it to be remade or forgotten.

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